

FILED

AUG 13 2021

KIMBERLY A. ALLEN
GRANT COUNTY CLERK

SUPERIOR COURT OF WASHINGTON IN AND FOR GRANT COUNTY

IN MATTER OF RESPONSE TO PUBLIC)	ORDER NO. 14 (21-04)
HEALTH EMERGENCY RE:)	
CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19)	1 st AMENDED ¹ - COURT'S STANDING
)	ORDER FOR EVICTION RESOLUTION
)	PILOT PROGRAM (ERPP)
)	<i>(Effective through</i>
_____)	<i>June 30, 2023)</i>

1. **Findings.** It is recognized that:

- A. Since late February 2020, the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis have combined to cause great health, social and economic harm to the people of the state of Washington, rendering many thousands unable to meet basic living expenses, including but not limited to rent expenses.
- B. Responding to the public health and economic emergency, on March 18, 2020, Governor Inslee issued Proclamation No. 20-19 imposing a moratorium on most residential evictions in Washington State. This Proclamation was renewed and the eviction moratorium was extended on multiple occasions. The most recent extension (Proclamation 20-19.6) expired June 30, 2021. Governor Inslee issued a Bridge Proclamation 21-09 on June 29, 2021.
- C. Anticipating significant numbers of unlawful detainer filings upon anticipated expiration of the Governor's eviction moratorium, the Superior Court Judges' Association asked its Unlawful Detainer Work Group to develop a means of diverting nonpayment of rent cases away from the courts and into a collaborative resolution process that brings together landlords and their attorneys, tenants, legal aid and

¹ This Amended Order contains a modified ERPP Notice that now identifies local tenant resource information. The modified ERPP Notice is attached as *Exhibit A*.

housing justice projects, administrators of state and local rent assistance programs, and trained eviction resolution specialists employed by community-based dispute resolution centers. The pre-5160 SCJA Pilot Eviction Resolution Programs (ERPs) and related operating protocols were established in King, Snohomish, Pierce, Thurston, Clark, and Spokane Counties, and conciliation and/or mediation services commenced in November 2020.

- D. Current estimates indicate that more than 220,000² individual households are currently in rent arrears and face the prospect of potential eviction after the current moratorium expires.
- E. On April 22, 2021, Governor Inslee signed Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5160 into law (*i.e.* ch.115, Laws of 2021) which took effect that day. This legislation substantially changes the law governing landlord-tenant relations, generally prevents eviction for failure to pay unpaid rents accrued during the Governor's eviction moratorium, changes unlawful detainer practice and procedure, provides statewide authorization and support for court-established Eviction Resolution Pilot Programs (ERPPs) beyond the initial six pilot programs established pre-5160 by the SCJA and establishes a right to counsel for indigent tenants in unlawful detainer proceedings.
- F. The final FY 2021-23 operating budget enacted by the Washington State Legislature provides funding to underwrite ERPP operations, implement the right to counsel program for indigent tenants, and includes \$658,000,000 for rent assistance payments to tenants and landlords, offering landlords and tenants significantly expanded opportunities to resolve rent related disputes that might otherwise lead to the filing of an unlawful detainer action following expiration of the eviction moratorium.
- G. Court operations have been substantially curtailed since April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mandatory orders issued by the Washington Supreme Court and the need to comply with essential public health and safety protocols have caused

² Surveys from July 5th, 2021 suggest that approximately 16% of Washington's renters are behind on rent, or 220,059 households. (<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/hhp/hhp33.html#tables>; see Housing Tables 1b).

this court to suspend and/or modify various operations, delay criminal and civil trials, and establish other procedures that have had a profound negative impact on how and when this court considers and renders judgment in cases in virtually all dockets. This has resulted in a continuing substantial backlog of civil, criminal, juvenile, and child welfare matters. The COVID-19 challenges have been compounded by the anticipated new demands on this court resulting from *State v. Blake*, 197 Wash.2d 170, 481 P.3d 521 (2021).

- H. Given the administrative backlog this court is facing, the anticipated unlawful detainer filings following expiration of the Bridge Proclamation 21-09 after September 30, 2021 presents a continuing threat to the ability of this court to timely hear and fairly decide such cases consistent with statutory deadlines, due process and mandated procedures.
- I. State and local rent-assistance programs offer the opportunity for immediate assistance in addressing rent arrearages (or portions thereof) and avoiding the need to seek recourse through the unlawful detainer process. It is in this court's interest in managing its docket, facilitating just outcomes, and wisely utilizing scarce judicial resources to divert not-yet-filed cases away from the contested unlawful detainer process in court to an eviction resolution pilot program where there is a reasonable likelihood of a just resolution.
- J. Sec. 7(2) of ch. 115, Laws of 2021 requires that, where an ERPP is established under authority of a standing judicial order, landlords use that program before filing an unlawful detainer action based on nonpayment of rent. Section 7(3) requires that the landlord provide an ERPP Notice to the tenant of the eviction resolution program along with the 14-day notice to pay or vacate prior to filing an unlawful detainer action. The Court adopts and requires the Landlord to use the form ERPP Notice developed by AOC in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General. See *Exhibit A* hereto.
- K. Governor Inslee issued Bridge Proclamation 21-09 on June 29, 2021, which is effective from July 1 – September 30, 2021. The Bridge Proclamation is not an extension of the Governor's Eviction Moratorium Proclamation (20-19). All

evictions typically allowed under the law, with the exception of non-payment of rent, may resume July 1, 2021.

- L. ***Exhibit A*** hereto suffices as the ERPP Notice required by the Bridge Proclamation that the landlord must give to the tenant providing an opportunity to participate in an operational rental assistance program and an operational ERPP.
- M. This court has determined it appropriate to issue this standing order to establish an Eviction Resolution Pilot Program to divert unlawful detainer cases from the docket and facilitate both pre-filing resolution of cases where the principle issue in context is non-payment of rent. The court designates the Presiding Judge to serve as the procedural point person(s) to work with relevant stakeholders on the implementation and ongoing administration of the ERPP.

2. **Order:**

- A. **Landlord/Landlord Counsel's Obligations Regarding Eviction Resolution.** Prior to serving and/or filing a summons and complaint for nonpayment of rent *post-moratoria* the landlord or landlord's counsel shall:

- (i) ***strictly comply with*** the notice, service, and certification requirements of Sec. 7(3), (4), and (5) of Chapter 115, Laws of 2021, and the Governor's Bridge Proclamation 21-09 issued on June 29, 2021 as applicable;

- (ii) schedule a meeting for the landlord, tenant, and their respective counsel to meet and confer with the Columbia Basin Dispute Resolution Center (DRC), hereinafter referred to as "the meet and confer", to facilitate the resolution of the issue of nonpayment of rent, *e.g.* accessing rental assistance, as well as entering reasonable payment plans; and

- (iii) file the ERPP DRC Certification Form at the time of filing a summons and complaint with the court.

- B. **Tenant's Obligations Regarding Eviction Resolution.** Tenants must respond to landlords regarding establishing reasonable repayment plans and participate in eviction resolution programs per the timelines established in E2SSB 5160. (*See Governor's Bridge Proclamation – Page 4.*)

- C. **DRC Scheduling and Certification of ERPP.**

- (1) During the effective period of the Bridge Proclamation, the local DRC shall make every effort to schedule the meet and confer for the landlord and the tenant (and their respective counsel) within 28 days of receipt of the ERPP Notice;
- (2) Once the Bridge Proclamation expires, the local DRC shall make every effort to schedule the meet and confer for the landlord and tenant (and their respective counsel) within 21 days of receipt of the ERPP Notice;
- (3) during and after the expiration of the Bridge Proclamation, the parties may agree to extend the timeframe (as detailed in this section) for scheduling the meet and confer;
- (4) the local DRC shall implement processes necessary to schedule and hold the meet and confer in the timeframes detailed in this section;
- (5) During the effective time period of the Bridge Proclamation, should a tenant not engage in the first 28 days (after the landlord has issued/served the ERPP Notice and, subsequently the 14-day notice to pay or vacate), DRC Certification that the landlord has satisfied the requirements of Sec. 7 of Chapter 115, Laws of 2021 shall issue;
- (6) After the Bridge Proclamation has expired, should a tenant not engage in the first 14 days (pursuant to the ERPP Notice and the 14-day notice to pay or vacate), DRC Certification that the landlord has satisfied the requirements of Sec. 7 of Chapter 115, Laws of 2021 shall issue;
- (7) If a landlord files a nonpayment of rent unlawful detainer case without DRC certification, this Court may address whether the landlord complied with the ERPP and all conditions precedent to suit. Should the court find that the landlord was entitled to DRC certification notwithstanding DRC's failure to certify, the court may proceed with the show cause hearing or trial;
- (8) The DRC may add relevant language to a certificate of ERPP participation prior to its issuance to a landlord that details: whether rent assistance was available at the time of the engagement (*for example*, did the tenant qualify for rent assistance and was rent assistance available in the relevant locality at this time), the date the DRC received the ERPP Notice and the date on the ERPP Notice, whether the tenant participated in ERPP efforts, whether the tenant had counsel during ERPP, whether

the DRC was able to conduct conciliation efforts, and any other relevant information to help the court determine whether the matter is ripe for adjudication.

D. **DRC Reporting Obligations.** In order to comply with the requirements of ch. 115, Laws of 2021, Sec. 7(7) related to ERPP data collection, the Court acknowledges that the local DRC (by and through Resolution Washington, *i.e.* ResWA) has agreed to provide and will provide ERPP data as detailed in Sec. 7(7)(b)-(d) to AOC through an AOC-designated portal. It is understood that AOC will collect, analyze, and organize the data provided by the DRC and provide an ERPP data report to the legislature as required by ch. 115, Laws of 2021 Sec. 7 (8) on the dates identified therein.

E. **Initial Hearing Procedures for Unlawful Detainer Cases.**

(1) Upon implementation of the right to counsel plan for this court by OCLA pursuant to Secs. 8 and 9 of Chapter 115, Laws of 2021, the following provision will take effect: At the first hearing, the court will advise the tenant of their right to appointed counsel if indigent and inquire whether they wish to assert that right. If so, the court shall refer the tenant to the county-specific entity or entities designated by the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA)³ for eligibility screening and/or appointment of counsel (*e.g.* Eviction Defense Hotline or legal aid program) by sharing the name and contact number for said entity, unless counsel has previously been appointed for the tenant prior to filing of the case with the court. If a tenant is referred for appointment of counsel, the Court will continue the initial hearing as appropriate to allow the litigant to receive assistance from assigned counsel within appropriate timeframes as allowed by law and/or court rule.

(2) In non-payment of rent cases in which a DRC Certification was issued **after expiration** of the Governor's Eviction Moratorium (*i.e.* after June 30, 2021):

(a) At the first hearing, the court shall determine:

- (i) whether the landlord has complied with the notice, service, participation, and certification filing requirements of Sec. 7 of Chapter 115, laws of 2021, and the Governor's Bridge Proclamation 21-09 issued on June 29, 2021 as applicable; and

³ As of the date of this order, the Grant County Superior Court understands the designated entity is the Wenatchee office of the Northwest Justice Project and the Chelan-Douglas Volunteer Attorney Program.

(ii) whether the landlord and tenant met and conferred with the local DRC for purposes of resolving the issue of nonpayment of rent;

(b) If the tenant fails to appear at the first hearing, and the court finds the landlord has demonstrated compliance with the applicable law, the court may issue an order of default at the request of the landlord;

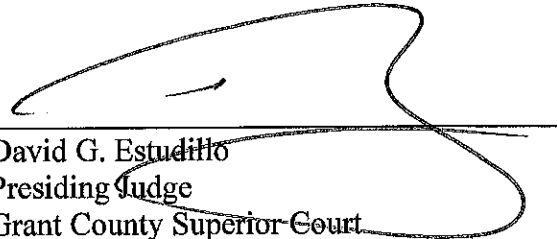
(c) Sanctions available for the landlord's noncompliance with notice, service, or certification filing requirements include but are not limited to: awarding attorney's fees and costs, granting a continuance, and any other relief as allowed by law and/or court rule;

(3) *In non-payment of rent cases in which a DRC Certification was issued during the Governor's eviction moratorium:* At the first hearing, the court will inquire as to the circumstances surrounding the issuance of the DRC Certification.⁴ The court may continue the matter or consider and grant other relief as allowed by law and/or court rule.

(4) In non-payment of rent cases where a DRC Certification was issued along with an agreement between the parties, the court reserves its ability to enforce such agreements, including those that reached agreement on matters addressed by the rental agreement beyond nonpayment of rent.

F. **Superseding Effect.** This order supersedes all prior standing orders issued with respect to the practice and procedure relating to the pilot Eviction Resolution Program, if any.

DATED this 13th day of August, 2021.


David G. Estudillo
Presiding Judge
Grant County Superior Court

⁴ E.g., whether rent assistance was available at the time of the engagement (*for example*, did the tenant qualify for rent assistance and was rent assistance available in the relevant locality at this time), the date the DRC received the notice and the date on the notice, whether the tenant participated in ERPP efforts, whether tenant had counsel during ERPP, whether DRC was able to conduct conciliation efforts, and any other relevant information to help the court determine whether the matter is ripe for adjudication.

EXHIBIT A

ERPP Notice and Resource Information

Use this form **after** the eviction moratorium ends.

Important! Landlords: Fill out page 1 completely and correctly with all the information that you know. Your information and your attorney's information, if you have one, must be included. You must provide a copy of this notice to the tenant and **also** send a copy to the local dispute resolution center serving the area where the property is located (see page 2). You should retain proof of service.



Behind on rent? Here is a chance to resolve the dispute with your landlord

Superior Court Eviction Resolution Pilot Program (ERPP)

Tenants: To participate see below and respond by (date): _____!
(14 days after this notice is given to tenant)

Important! Tenants: Failure to respond to this notice within 14 days may result in the filing of a summons and complaint for an unlawful detainer action with the court (eviction).

To:

Tenant's Name:

Property Address:

Tenant's Phone:

Tenant's Email:

From:

Landlord's Name:

Landlord's service address:

Landlord's Phone:

Landlord's Email:

Landlord's Lawyer (if any) Name:

Lawyer's Address:

Lawyer's Phone:

Lawyer's Email:



Your landlord is asking you to take part in the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program

⚠ Do not wait! You can get help.

What is the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program (ERPP)?

Your county's Superior Court uses this program. ERPP requires landlords to try to reach agreements with tenants about unpaid rent before they can ask for eviction in court. You may be eligible for **rent assistance** and **legal help** through the ERPP.

If you participate in the ERPP, your landlord must work with you and a specialist from your local **Dispute Resolution Center (DRC)**. If that solves the problem, great! If not, the DRC will offer free mediation. Mediation is voluntary – it only happens if both sides agree to do it.

You have a right to negotiated **payment plan** that works for you.




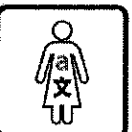
Why should I participate?

If you get this notice and do **not** respond or try to reach an agreement, your landlord may file for eviction in court. You can get help from a **free lawyer** if you are not sure what to do.

- Rent assistance
- Free mediation
- Free legal help

What is mediation? It is when a trained person (a mediator) helps you solve a problem or reach an agreement with someone else. You can ask for mediation at your local **Dispute Resolution Center**. Mediators are impartial and help all participants reach resolution.

Get help now! Contact these free resources in your county.

	Rent Assistance Housing Authority of Grant County 1139 Larson Blvd Moses Lake, WA 98837 Telephone: (509) 762-5541 www.hagc.net
	Dispute Resolution Centers Columbia Basin Dispute Resolution Center 256 Basin Street NW, Suite B Ephrata, WA 98823 Telephone: (509) 760-0706 www.cbdrcc.org
	Lawyers Statewide Eviction Defense Screening Line 1-855-657-8387 (free) Northwest Justice Project 300 Okanogan Avenue, Suite 3A Wenatchee, WA 98801 Telephone (509) 664-5101 www.nwjustice.org <u>Quincy Satellite Office:</u> 1309 S. Central Avenue Quincy, WA 98848 Telephone: (509) 381-2332
	Free interpreter services are available at all these programs The Washington State Office of the Attorney General has this notice in multiple languages on its website: www.atg.wa.gov/landlord-tenant . You will also find information there on how to find a lawyer or advocate at low or no cost and any available resources to help you pay your rent. Alternatively, you may find additional information to help you at www.washingtonlawhelp.org and www.courts.wa.gov .

I want to take part in the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program. What do I do now?

You can start the process by doing one of these things:

- Contact the Dispute Resolution Center in your county.
- Fill out and return this form to your landlord at the address on page 1. Keep a copy.

You can also get a lawyer, whether or not you participate in the ERPP.

<input checked="checked" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I want help resolving my unpaid rent. Contact me at:	
Tenant's Name:	
Tenant's Address:	
Tenant's Phone:	Tenant's Email: